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On democratic glossaries: 'soft power' and hard markets in post-revolutionary Tunisia

Inside Tunisian civic training programmes funded by foreign donors in the post-revolutionary period, democratic training collapses into neoliberal frames of being and doing. This paper traces the 'soft power' that imbues the glossaries of democratisation with a specifically economic logic. It argues that this economic logic influences the shaping of an emerging civic public in Tunisia along international objectives despite the translation of the civic training lexicon into standard Arabic or the Tunisian dialect and the multilingual code-switching of the training sessions. Engendering this young civic public as a counter-public to earlier articulations of civic awareness and practice—that are now construed as unruly, violent, and unproductive—the internationally approved glossaries of democratic deliberation and civic action recalibrate democracy as predominantly the space for free competition, production, and consumption. While not unique to Tunisia, the Tunisian case urges us to think of the paradoxes of democratic transition in places where the state simultaneously strives to build institutions of liberal representative democracy and simultaneously alters the meaning of liberal representative democracy along neoliberal lines.

Keywords: soft power, democracy, neoliberalism, civil society, youth, Tunisia

Author: Charis Boutieri, King's College London, charis.boutieri@kcl.ac.uk

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In the case of Tunisian civic training programmes in the post-2011 period, the ethnographic focus of this paper, contemporary manifestations of 'soft power' reveal the collapsing of democratic deliberation into neoliberal frames of being and doing. This article follows in action the multilingual glossary of one civic training session to demonstrate the cross-pollination of processes of democratic transition with global market integration. Through this cross-pollination and the hierarchies it reveals, the article shows how misleading and elliptic multilingual code switching can be in reflecting the flourishing of a globalised liberal democratic culture. In short, the multilingualism of these programmes imbues training with the misleading impression of a smooth local appropriation of an ostensibly universal glossary of democratic liberation and civic action. Through an attention to the use of such a glossary, the paper 'circles back' (Riles 2006) to trace the soft power gestures that underpin the shaping of an emerging Tunisian civic public via a barely concealed economic logic; this logic may well be inherent in the origins of the concept of soft power, but is substantially exacerbated in its current form.

This emerging Tunisian civic public is in some tension with earlier or other contemporary civic publics forged either through working class, third worldist incentives, or through acts of disobedience considered altogether unproductive in labour terms. Pushing for the blossoming of this emerging civic public as a desirable counter-public to the latter, which are construed as unruly, violent, and unproductive, the internationally approved glossaries of deliberative democracy that underpin civic training programmes recalibrate democracy as predominantly the space for free competition, production, and consumption. In this light, soft power serves as a locus

for the study of the hard market—in short, neoliberal politics with neo-colonial aspirations (Spivak 2001)—as it unfolds in the space of post-revolutionary Tunisia. This phenomenon is not unique to Tunisia, but what makes the Tunisian case particularly attention-grabbing is that neoliberal imperialism destabilises certain state operations at the very moment other domains of the state strive to (re)build themselves along the conventionally political liberal axes of democratic consolidation. I argue that the glossaries of the programmes in question index the very struggle of defining politics, a civic public, and democracy.

Circling Back

The concept of soft power has not yet captivated social science theory, and for good reason. From early on, the epistemological horizons of sociology and anthropology have allowed power a multi-layered and intricately interweaved life. Max Weber's twofold reflections on legitimacy—on the state's legitimate control of physical coercion on the one hand, and on the meaning and function of personal charisma and its bureaucratisation on the other (1922, 1958)—and Emile Durkheim's pioneering exploration of the defining ways structural fissures and social tensions impact the individual (1897), both feature in the various disciplines' shared canon. Power's ontological status and existential purpose assumed a prominent position in poststructuralist theory with Michel Foucault articulating the pervasive and productive nature of the 'power/knowledge' composite (1980), and with Pierre Bourdieu forging the notions of 'doxa' and 'habitus' to address the interaction with and the internalisation of power arrangements (1977). This line of inquiry did not shy away from scrutinising the state, but it attentively fragmented and multiplied the operations and effects of state power. For instance, the Marxist approach of Louis Althusser delved into the phenomenon of 'interpellation', namely the summoning and simultaneous shaping of the citizen-subject by the state through a variety of ideological 'apparatuses' (1971). Neither this list of names nor the temporality of the second half of the 20th century when the theoretical revisiting of the concept of power took place are coincidental. Significantly for students of the Maghrib, the conceptual heritage of French social theory had biographical connections with the experience of French imperialism. As a consequence, theoretical insights into power dovetailed well with assessments of colonialism, its aftermath, and its afterlives.

Drawing on the above conceptual repertoire, historical research on the Maghrib exposed the ubiquitous role of 'culture' in the modernist, imperialist venture of French inflection, a venture that saw culture largely as synonymous to the presumed singular and universal concept of civilisation (Lorcin 1995; Segalla 2009). Literary critique and cultural studies exposed the both creative and tortuous ways in which variably positioned actors within the imperialist framework engaged with the systematic, and systematically unequal, instrumentalisation of culture, understood mainly as the mental and practical line of differentiation between people(s) (Harrison 2003; Bensmaia 2009). This latter definition of *culture* may have been plural, but it was certainly antagonistic: European versus North African, elite versus popular, urban versus rural, male versus female, and so on (McDougall 2006). At the centre of these power encounters across space, materiality, and imagination, critical theory has detected and dissected tensions of translation (Derrida 1985), the pain of

incommensurability (Steiner 1975), and the price of difference everywhere, not least within the liberal utopian thinking that underwrites democratic promotion (Povinelli 2001). Inspired by the above heritage, the fields of sociolinguistics and the anthropology of language politics have used empirical evidence to show how languages—national, minority, sub-cultural, or meta-languages—index and shape (political) institutions and (political) realities, both in ordinary times and in exceptional ones (Woolard-Schieffelin 1994; Haeri 2000; Ahearn 2001). This type of inquiry argues for an appreciation of the complex and often unexpected interplay between speakers (a metaphor for people) and various manifestations of power, an interplay that permits at times oppression, manoeuvring, and reversal.¹

For the above-mentioned directions of thought and empirical investigation, soft power constitutes a less exciting proposition for grasping aspects of individual and collective experience and a more interesting historical and located object of study. Namely, soft power constitutes the particular instantiation of cultural encounters that emerged from Cold War configurations and desires, encounters that have assumed specific shapes and that undergird specific stakes in the contemporary period of post-9/11 geopolitics and late capitalism. Given how self-conscious, historically aware, and overtly instrumentalised soft power is as a national and transnational discourse and tool, it is hard to imagine how one may add new knowledge to its operations. It seems, then, that a more fertile way to engage with soft power—without assuming neatness, teleology or uniformity in the concept—is not through description as much as through the analytical move of ‘circling back’. As suggested by Riles (2006), circling back entails side-lining the goal of providing a ‘thick description’ of the operations of soft power, which runs the risk of buying into soft power’s own claims of alluding to a novel reality, for the benefit of tackling the assumptions that underpin the concept as it discursively and performatively navigates time and space. Akin but not identical to genealogical deconstruction, the goal of circling back is only partly to unearth an unclaimed epistemological shift in normative paradigms—in our case, a shift from a more territorially based imperialism towards non-territorially-oriented economic domination. More precisely, circling back consists of ‘engaging old social relations in a new register’ (Riles 2006, 62-63), that is, returning to earlier manifestations of cultural tutelage—especially of a liberal kind—through a systematic examination of its glossaries and modes of action.

Glossaries of Training

In my ethnographic research on civic training programmes run by a vibrant and predominantly youthful Tunisian civil society, language and soft power interacted most intimately in the glossaries that fashioned training in democratic deliberation and advocacy work.² Considered the best—and for some the only—success story of the historical events often labelled as the ‘Arab Spring’ or the ‘Arab Uprising’ (2011), Tunisia shifted swiftly from popular protests and violent standoffs with army and police forces to fast-paced institutional change, the main purpose of which was the recalibration of the relationship between state and society. Unhinged from the repressive and coercive strategies of fifty-five years of authoritarian rule—following the equally illiberal French Protectorate structure—and emboldened by new legislation on the right to association, diverse older and newer citizen forums and

organisations—what we often designate in the singular as Tunisian civil society—led multiple agendas of institutional and social reform.³ Consistent with its visions for democracy promotion and assistance elsewhere, the international community of foreign offices, political parties, and multilateral development agencies such as the World Bank, the UNDP, and USAID understood the safeguarding and dissemination of liberal representative democracy as the product of tutelage. Thus, substantial investments in funding and knowledge sharing, otherwise referred to as ‘best practice’, took centre stage in the running of political institutions as well as of civil society: from the National Constituent Assembly, to the UGTT (Tunisia’s largest trade union), and to a plethora of smaller mushrooming associations set up by young Tunisian activists. While the landscape of funding and activity is interesting to map out and explore in its entirety, it is the latter associations and their own staging of civic training that is the direct object of this ethnographic inquiry.

The civic training in focus here emerges out of the post-revolutionary associative environment. Its various programmes unfold and operate thanks to funding provisions that are most often the result of multilateral cooperation between the Tunisian Ministry of Interior, the foreign offices and local embassies of various governments, and international organisations. The mission of such programmes is to offer training on different aspects of deliberate democracy and civic action—from participating in electoral procedures and the running of regional and central government, to various aspects of social justice promotion such as the empowerment of marginalised groups and communities and the redressing of institutional harm (exclusion, persecution and so on). In these programmes, it is predominantly Tunisian volunteer-activists who become project leaders, managers, and trainers for the benefit of either a well-specified section of society or the general public. Occasionally, and depending on what funding allows, more seasoned development professionals of international background are brought in for ‘guidance’.

Since the revolution, these predominantly young Tunisian activists (aged mostly between 18 and 35) have immersed themselves in an international arena of civic engagement through travelling, discussing, and receiving training by various donor governments and organisations. It is no coincidence, I believe, that the Tunisian activist-trainers I had the chance to interview and follow in action, none of whom would I consider the offspring of the established elite class, capitalised on their linguistic skills in French and English as well as their mastery of the glossary of democracy promotion and of international development. Funding applications and report writing have brought these trainers and their donors into close contact, thus increasing the need for a shared code of communication of the objectives and desirable outcomes of training. However, the life cycle of a project, which usually exceeded a funding cycle, and the need to source funding from a variety of donors to make ends meet meant that there was considerable leeway in the way these activists set up and ran their various programmes and campaigns. For one, trainers were encouraged to adapt external curricula for civic training to Arabic, predominantly *tunisi* (Tunisian Arabic), for the benefit of participants who were not adequately multilingual or who felt estranged from content expressed in a foreign language. Beyond this linguistic translation, trainers were able to fashion training methods in ways that would be most beneficial to their trainees. One of the many captivating

aspects of the training programmes I observed was the horizontal quality of training they offered, a style of training imbued with refreshing ingenuity in pedagogical methods and tone.

The colossal dedication and creativity of both trainers and participants aside, the imprint of international glossaries of 'democracy' and 'education' of a specific inflection is not just discernible but actually pervasive in the documents, curricula, and discussions that take place throughout the programmes. One telling example is the widespread redefinition of civic training as *capacity-building* used interchangeably in English, French '*renforcement de capacités*', and in Arabic '*tanmiyat al-qudarāt*'. One of the main contentions of this article is that this lexicon may well be multilingual with a substantial degree of code-switching, but in essence it positions pre-existing Tunisian glossaries of democratic deliberation and civic action below or outside the remit of contemporary civic training. This paper focuses on one such programme to demonstrate how trainers and participants negotiate the intersection of civic action and market logic through their linguistic choices.

Working for Democracy

On the 14th January 2014, the anniversary of the popular overthrow of the Tunisian president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and the dissolution of his one-party regime, an act that continues to be referred to as '*al-thawra*' (the revolution), a daily newspaper headline featured this pronouncement by the then newly elected President Beji Caid Essebsi: 'Today we start to work!' The title caught my eye as I rushed through the unusually empty and silent streets of downtown Tunis on my way to a training session commencing in the early morning. In stark contrast with the lethargic city centre during what has been established as a national holiday for both the public and the private sector, the office space that hosted the session was bustling with noise. By the time I knocked on the door of this office, set in a dilapidated but stunning early 20th century French colonial apartment building, I was running fifteen minutes late due to the lack of public transport on that day. Surprisingly, the fourteen high school students and five members of staff of the small but very active association that I will call 'Democracy Now' were already *at work*, seated around a round table and deep in discussion. Room and roundtable were equipped with what I had come to recognise as the material cosmos of civic training: Post-It notes, pens and notepads, association banners, a whiteboard, smartphones of all types buzzing with messages and photo taking of participants, and a variety of juices and biscuits.

The student-participants came from different parts of the capital—some from distant and non-privileged city suburbs—but most attended 'pioneer' public high schools (*lycées pilotes*) reserved for well-performing motivated students. The students I met were one group out of five in total positioned around the country. Most groups had arranged the equivalent session on the same school holiday so as not to distract students from their school homework. Recruitment had taken place through announcements on social media, mainly Facebook. The students had applied to participate through a bio and a short written essay, in the language of their choice, explaining their reasons for engaging in the specific project. The project consisted of a multi-stage advocacy campaign for the provision of professional orientation staff

inside secondary public education. This advocacy campaign required the training of students 'leaders' (referred to as either *qāda* or as 'leaders' in English) who would represent their fellow classmates to the wider public and to key institutions. The project rationale, as declared in its written documentation—solely in English—intended for procuring funding bids from international donors, was to encourage youth, 'formerly ignored in processes of *decision making*', to 'research and propose solutions including a *plan of action* despite their lack of experience but with the aim to change and help new generations benefit from a better educational system and contribute, indirectly, to the improvement of employment conditions in Tunisia.' The backdrop to this campaign was a widespread recognition that the public educational system did not provide information or assistance to students with regards to their choice of disciplinary track and further professional trajectories. This, the project documents argued, contributed to a labour force not only poorly prepared for the demands of the job market in present day, Tunisia but also unhappy with the entire process of its professionalisation. The association 'Democracy Now', a pseudonym that preserves the association's choice of an English title to facilitate recognition by international donors, defined its mission in terms of training for democratic citizenship for the purposes of public advocacy and participation.

The incremental phases of the project would be the following: the chosen student-leaders would become familiar with setting up an advocacy campaign for the establishment of professional orientation staff inside high schools. Subsequently, they would disseminate their message to the wider public, and, eventually, they would present their views in a public forum to a group of 'decision makers', otherwise referred to in training as '*preneurs de décisions*' or '*ṣunā' al-qarār*', made up of delegates from the Ministry of Education, private companies, human resources recruiters, donors, and professional consultants. The training was the responsibility of members of the association 'Democracy Now' and of a few guest trainers with a foot in the private sector, specifically people with expertise in technology, media, and youth professionalisation. This type of partnership between civil society and business, which included joint programmes between non-governmental organisations and tech giants such as Microsoft and Orange Telecom, was very common in the post-revolutionary landscape where this and other associations put their civic visions to action. At the time of the workshop in question, 'Democracy Now' did not compensate any of its staff and could not afford its own working space. The association had originally secured funding for \$4000 from a conglomeration of prestigious funders such as the US State Department MEPI (The Middle East Partnership Initiative), UNESCO, and a European foundation focused on Mediterranean development. After a number of training sessions for staff, travelling around the country for recruitment and organisational purposes, occasionally renting out office space for activities, and reimbursing student commute to the venues where training took place, this funding was already close to running out. Staff and participants were happy to keep going without financial assistance with a view to claiming more funding in subsequent donor calls.

The session I attended on the national anniversary morning—part of a series of sessions spanning three months—aimed to give students advice on how to connect with the general public on the topic of professional orientation in schools and produce

an advocacy campaign mediated through social and potentially even mainstream media. The training I will go into in some detail was the responsibility of 21-year-old Malek, the IT expert of the association and a university student in information technology. Malek conducted his training in *tunisi* with some code switching with French and English. Malek had the assistance of Houssem, a younger but equally tech-savvy volunteer who was active in a number of associations, including a social media club that pushed for the use of social media for civic action.

Malek began by enumerating the stages of a successful advocacy campaign. The first stage, he said, was identifying '*al-jumhūr al-mustahdaf*' (target audience).⁴ He explained that in business environments this is a crucial process that requires the hiring of specialists and the running of workshops. He advised the students that their own audience was a '*pyramide*' of decision makers (top), teachers and parents (middle), and students (bottom). Moving to a quick exercise for consolidation, he asked the group to name several consumer goods and then locate their target audience. The first example they came up with was the yogurt Danone, product of the French multinational company Danone, which has a quasi-monopoly in yogurt provision in Tunisia and, in my experience, in North Africa more generally. Students confidently stated that the product's target audience is the nuclear family: mother, father, and child. Following on this example, Malek asked the group to decide on the language of communication students should use with their own target audience in their advocacy campaign. Someone suggested French, the still predominant foreign language and an important language for school and the public sphere, yet the group settled on *tunisi*, concluding that the dialect could reach the largest number of people across generational, regional, and class divides. Considerations of age, location, and social position led Malek to his second point regarding the optimum use of different kinds of media. He pointed out that blogs, Facebook and Twitter are to an extent a limited and elite form of media, and that the team should find a way to ensure the widest possible dissemination of their message. He admitted that radio and TV messages would have the widest reach but given the lack of funding the association could not support such expensive ventures. One of the students, momentarily pausing from feverishly taking notes, reflected on whether the format of the message depends on the medium: 'Will we say things differently on social media than on radio?' A brief discussion ensued over the ways in which the same message could grab the attention of diverse groups within Tunisian society.

Evidently, this training session paired civic action with the techniques of media dissemination for commercial activity: it designated a target audience, determined this audience's linguistic and media habits, and brainstormed over ways to grab its attention—positing this target audience as exposed to other messages in competition with the association's agenda. These considerations evinced a highly rationalised but also critically commodified version of civic action. In this framework, the process of debate—analysing a problem, gauging public opinion, and facing decision makers—critically depends on techniques of shaping and distributing information in effective ways. Malek was adamant about the fact that government agents and private actors alike would only take notice of the campaign after it had established itself in the (mediated) public sphere. Houssem suggested that the '*ba'ath*' (launch) of the advocacy campaign could make use of the advertising strategy of '*teasing*', by which

he meant the dissemination of 'teasers': enigmatic messages that would intrigue the general public. His example was an earlier advertising campaign of Orange Telecom mobile phone contracts that had featured on billboards in urban centres all over Tunisia. The students recognised the campaign and admitted that they found it effective.

Perusing through the plethora of documents—recruitment announcements, reports, and pedagogical material—that have informed an international approach to Tunisia's political transition out of authoritarianism, one is struck by the consistent emphasis of this kind of tutelage in civic engagement, a tutelage undergirded by a down-to-earth, efficiency-driven attitude. This direction of civic training was not unique to Tunisia and in fact preceded the 2011 events by a few years. Examining a sample of US-produced documents, due to the particular association's funding connections, a report on a joint National Democratic Institute-MEPI organised conference entitled 'Youth of Today, Leaders of Tomorrow' that took place in Morocco, inaugurated a year long apprenticeship programme for young women from the region that paid attention to the 'fundamentals of community organising: strategic planning, advocacy, networking, image, self-confidence building, on-camera presentation, time management, fundraising, use of technology' (23 June 2009, NDI website). Post-2011, the NDI-led initiative 'Tunisia Campaign School' consisted of a two year programme to shape 'competitive candidates' with an improved capacity to 'define messages, communicate with the public, run campaigns' (18 May 2013, NDI website). Similar projects run by IRI (International Republican Institute) in Tunisia involved a 'year long series of leadership and technical trainings' aimed at 'candidate development, campaign management, and get out the vote techniques' (13 April 2012, IRI website).

Most relevant to Malek's session described above is the 344-page-long 'Campaign Skills Handbook', destined for the campaign schools of the Middle East and North Africa. A joint output of the US State Department and MEPI, the handbook is meant to provide political activists with 'tools to manage resources and target voters wisely' through a series of modules (O'Connell et al. 2013, 4). Among these modules, number 8, entitled 'Building a communication's strategy', discusses tactics, tools, and techniques for reaching the desired audience. These techniques are summarised as follows: 1) Determine your objective(s); 2) Define your key audiences; 3) Identify the most important media outlets for your campaign; and, 4) Create a tactical outreach plan of events and activities designed to generate the coverage you want and on the platforms you need in order to reach your key audiences (O'Connell et al. 2013, 230). These 'best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the need of MENA countries' formed—intentionally or not—the scaffolding of Malek's lesson plan for the session in question. In fact, these practices of relating to a target audience rather sidelined discussions of the issue at hand: namely the absence of professional orientation inside secondary level public education and the ramifications of such absence on the carving of professional futures of Tunisian students.

While the intention of the training session was certainly civic-minded, its glossary and pedagogical direction embedded citizenship in the dynamics of competition and designated choice to consume advocacy as the predominant right of the receiving

Tunisian public. The topic of the campaign, professional orientation in high schools, undergirded this direction by instrumentalising the way one understands reform in the system and the experience of public education—a topic that I will address in more detail later. The session was so cunningly similar to what I imagine a digital advertising or marketing class would be like that I wondered whether these committed students perceived their civic participation through a double lens: as a way to contribute to processes of democratic deliberation and as an opportunity to acquire the so-called ‘transferrable’ and ‘soft’ skills of communication and campaigning, skills construed as key for the neoliberal labour market (Urcuioli 2008; Boutieri 2016). In short, in their initial encounter with what civic engagement is, looks, or feels like, the lexicon of technical skills and hyper-rationalisation became the template for acting for the common good.

The use of this glossary of civic action (in which I incorporate jargon, examples used, and methods inferred) resonated with all those present in the workshop. However, heard against the backdrop of commemoration speeches and anthems of the ‘*thawra*’ (revolution), arguably the most landmark political event in present day Tunisia, on that same day and throughout the longer period of political transformation from 2011 to 2015, this glossary rang somewhat dissonant. The interchangeable concepts of ‘*cible*’ (target audience) and ‘*marché*’ (market) throughout the training introduced a double dimension to the training itself; the imagined Tunisian public that this particular civic action targeted appeared first and foremost as consumers of the civic space for deliberation and influence, who sought messages branded and packaged in systematic ways reliant on the marketing strategies of visibility and repetition. Indicatively, Malek compared their advocacy work for the establishment of professional orientation staff at schools with the media promotion of Ramadan-specific consumer goods: ‘Consider what happens with Ramadan food’ he noted, ‘you see it advertised so widely and so frequently that the moment you enter the supermarket you recognise it immediately!’ What alternative glossaries did this training obscure or replace?

The Tunisian Past as Source of Civic Knowledge

The glossary via which this training programme structured civic action addressed and concurrently brought to life a Tunisian civic public whose internal variation was subsumed to a supposedly general proclivity for choice as the prerequisite for freedom. Tellingly, this choice was articulated as the choice to produce an advocacy campaign and to consume (or not consume), messages regarding social reform. Debate and deliberation were insinuated as part of the process but not given pride of place in it. Yet amidst this dominant framing, the actual training experience unearthed aspects of Tunisian society that multiplied and complicated the images of civility, public space, and by consequence the state.

For one, the designation of a target audience made one student wonder about the ‘*mustawa thaqāfi*’ (cultural level) of the Tunisian public: ‘Launching this campaign here in Tunis’, she remarked, ‘is different from conducting it in Siliana (central Tunisia) or Le Kef (western Tunisia).’ The general consensus across the table shown by the nodding of heads and stunted smiles indicated that the students were deeply

aware of the socio-economic divides between the urbanised and effervescent capital, its high unemployment levels notwithstanding, and the stagnant interior and western parts of the country where the semi-urban settings of Siliana and Le Kef stretched. In these settings, conversations about professional orientation in schools risked sounding hollow, even ironic, in light of a flagrant lack of regular teachers, school facilities, and road infrastructure. These profound inequalities in schooling experience, products of the long-term and intended marginalisation of these presumed to be 'dissenting' regions by the authoritarian regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, gave public education a distinctly political dimension. This dimension was for the moment glossed over by the project's intention to modify the mechanisms of professionalisation instead of seriously engaging with the regionally and socially uneven distribution of state welfare from the time of decolonisation up to the post-revolution period. In essence then, what these student participants grappled with was a sanitised form of democracy instead of the opportunity to engage closely with difference and conflict, both of which inevitably ensue from democratic deliberation.

Amidst Malek's training in methods of public advocacy, another student wondered about the possibility of reaching and influencing school principals and the Ministry of Education. Malek suggested that these decision makers were bound to be parents themselves, who would endorse this advocacy campaign under the influence of their own children, who were also students. In his suggestion, Malek qualified teachers and Ministry of Education civil servants primarily through their private ties to schooling matters. Malek may have not known or understood the critical role of the '*naqāba*' (syndicate) in educational matters since colonial times and throughout the post-independence era (Haddad 2011). The Tunisian General Union of Labour (known widely through the acronym UGTT of the French title *Union générale des travailleurs tunisiens*, otherwise known as *Ittihād al-ʿām al-tunisi l-il-shughl*) comprised of a strong teachers' syndicate, of which secondary school teachers were especially influential. Additionally, the decades of *al-Harakāt al-Tulābiyya* (student movement) even through its rival university student unions (known widely through the acronyms UGET, from the French title *Union générale des étudiants de Tunisie*, and UGTE, from the French title *Union générale tunisienne des étudiants*) have for a long time constituted terrains for the enactment of a vigorous political culture of resistance (Dhifallah 2003; Omri 2016). In fact, schools, universities, and trade unions in Tunisia had been breeding grounds for political leadership and civic action not only of a secular orientation but also of a conservative, religious one. Trade unions, formed during the colonial period, used a different vocabulary of engagement to address power, namely that of the strike (*iḍrāb*), sit-ins (*iltisām*), periodical congress (*majlis*), and the manifesto (*bayān rasmi*) addressed to the French Residence and, later on, to the Tunisian government in place (Allouche 2016). It is worth noting here that such vocabulary imagines civic action through the interruption of production, the emphasis on mass deliberation, and the direct speaking back to power through community-sanctioned declarations. It is also important to note that despite the ebbs and flows of the relationship of these groups with the Tunisian state and the way this relationship affected the UGTT leadership's position towards economic liberalisation during Ben Ali's governance (Zemni 2013, 138), the Union has historically positioned civic activism and cultural activity as resistant to the onslaught of consumerism. Indicatively, the UGTT manifesto of 1952 declared the following: 'Capitalist and

colonial reaction(ism) , which in reality maintains all the territory, means of production, and the control of the administration, equally clamps onto the repressive apparatus that is unleashed upon the Tunisian people these days to break its combativeness and reduce it to slavery' (Allouche 2016, 57). Fast forward to 2008-2010 during the mining factory strikes in the southern town of Gafsa, believed to have laid the groundwork for the 2011 uprising, local trade unionists provided solidarity to the workers' movement and eventually put to work their networks throughout the country to co-ordinate manifestations of dissent across the board. In December and January 2011, the UGTT supported the strike action of various professional organisations and eventually a general strike was announced for the 14th January, the very day President Ben Ali fled the country (Zemni 2013, 132).

To these omissions of past Tunisian civic action, I add the intellectual movements of left-wing proclivities such as *Movement Perspectives*, with a strong presence in academic circles both within Tunisia and in France (Omri 2012). Educated either through reading third world theory and leftist political philosophy at university and/or inside prison cells during long periods of incarceration, discussing local and world politics in Ciné Clubs under the nose of colonial control or of Tunisian government policing, participants in these movements understood democracy in starkly different ways from the high school students of the workshop in question (Ferjani 2014; Naqqash 2011; Mabhout 2014), namely as the battleground of politically-loaded diversity and not as the product of rational and technical expertise. Yet despite being continuously vocal and present in the Tunisian public and political scene post-revolution, these local spaces of expertise for both educational and civic matters did not provide the desired know-how or *best practice* for the students in the workshop.

The discussion on the tone of the advocacy campaign on professional orientation juxtaposed or even pitted these earlier glossaries, including that of the political left, against the emerging civic public of post-revolutionary Tunisia. Tellingly, Malek differentiated between the 'firm tone of political campaigning', an example of which are the speeches of Hamma Hammami, and the softer tone of the '*rêve*' (dream), which he qualified as the 'Luis Vuitton ad type'. The choices of example are especially loaded given that Hamma Hammami was a figure of dissent against the Ben Ali regime, the leader of the coalition Popular Front, and the spokesman for the Tunisian Workers' Party. With a long presence in Tunisian political life and a candidacy in the October 2014 and January 2015 parliamentary and presidential elections respectively, Hammami is a characteristic figure in left-wing politics as this politics stood for political and economic distribution both before and after the Arab Uprising. Juxtaposed to this local and traditionally political tone was the Luis Vuitton genre of communication, which I understand as a globalised means of stirring desire and aspiration of status as the product of material prestige. Certainly, and as the mention of Hamma Hammami perceptively confirms, all political practice—discursive or not—aspires to affective and intellectual responses produced through a variety of visual and oratory genres. However, in Malek's lesson plan, the process of staging and the form of the message assume a more prominent place than the message itself or the process of its debate, to the point that left-wing politics appear as on the same platform as the commercially-minded Luis Vuitton ads. More poignantly, the figure of Hamma Hammami, chosen to exemplify firmness, indicates the dialectic

between a more conventional mode of addressing, and bringing to life, a politicised Tunisian public and a more globalised type of communication directed at, and shaping, a civic public free to consume or not consume diverse positions for social and political reform (Lukose 2007). Further evidence of the conscious way in which the association and its training endorsed this latter public was the effort of its director to placate some parental concerns that activities did not implicate their children in *politics*. That these parents and the association conceived democracy as potentially separate from institutional (partisan) politics, is demonstrative of the direction of democratic deliberation, civic action, and essentially democracy that this globalised democratic glossary pushes for.

Along similar lines, one member of the group expressed a doubt about the sincerity of relevant stakeholders in engaging with the association and its campaign: 'How do we know they're being honest when talking to us?' The trainers attempted to answer this question as a methodological conundrum – it was about arranging follow-up meetings and holding people accountable to their words through recording interviews. Yet the question introduced, albeit fleetingly, persistent doubts and hesitation about engaging with the state through asserting the right to representation and the duty of accountability. Rushing to finish off a rather long morning session, Housseem brought the group back to the question of *timing*, emphasising the importance of coordination and the pacing of the campaign. Ending with some advice about the different timing of social media—Facebook is good for advertising long-term whereas Twitter is for reporting events in real time—Housseem encouraged the group to model their strategy along the lines of a 'Harley Davidson ad': '*Votre projet est un produit*' (your project is a product) he said as a way to wrap up and allow the students to enjoy a free afternoon during the national holiday.

Yet another juxtaposed civic public, with its respective take on politics, had a pronounced gendered penchant for disobedience through lack of productivity. It was one of the two male trainers, Housseem, who digressed from the curriculum by asking: 'By the way, how come there are so few boys in your group?' The group laughed the question off with the response '*al-ulād fi-l-qahāwi* (the boys are in the cafés)'. I had been so engrossed in the content and form of the session that it was only at that point that I realised that the makeup of the student team was twelve girls and two boys. The trainers wondered how they could attract male youth to their project but the group insisted that most male students their age did not show enough interest either in educational matters or civil society. Similar observations about the predominant presence of girls in the burgeoning civil society in other training programmes implied two civic publics: a feminine-dominated, orderly, professionalised public that worked diligently on a school holiday, versus a masculine-dominated, gallivanting public occupying public space by being essentially unproductive.

The fact that this demarcation was a continuation of a gendered division of public space in post-revolutionary Tunisia did not become objects of discussion and reflection during the training. Equally, the discussion excluded and discredited the critical contribution of the latter public—unemployed men sitting in cafés or standing on the sidewalk with nothing to do—that for a long time nurtured the eventually widespread rejection of the Ben Ali government, and eventually kindled the various

eruptions of discontent to the transitional democratic governments of 2011 and 2014. While some scholars of the region have framed such an attitude as one of dissatisfaction with but also expectation of inclusion in the quick-paced onslaught of global market integration (Schielke 2015, 27), I maintain that we should not exclude the possibility that this type of 'idleness' enunciates a conscious opposition to cooptation in the forward movement of capital (Ross 2008, 10). In opening up this interpretive possibility, I consciously escape normative arguments about the connection between middle class engagement and the building of liberal democratic institutions that underpins the pedagogical material and the broader attitude of democratic tutelage that I have tried to encapsulate in this instantiation of soft power.

The Public and the Market

The training session I described, one of many of its kind in the post-revolutionary civic-minded Tunisian landscape, exemplifies how discourses of the market recalibrate the concepts of citizenship, democracy, and politics altogether. As analysed in depth by Chatterjee (1998, 2004) for the Indian case and aptly portrayed by Lukose (2007) in liberalising Kerala, market discourses shape a *civil society* that dovetails well with bourgeois, secular, and to a large extent 'Western' norms of public participation. This type of society is uneasy about other types of publics that the above researchers designate as the *political society*, that is, 'other, non-elite practices of mobilisation and participation in engagements with the state' rooted in traditions of anti-colonial and later on postcolonial political action (Lukose 2007, 507). Similarly here, the planned, orderly, productive space of the training workshop carves out a democratic space to counter the more disorderly, eruptive and consciously anti-productive space and time of labour struggles, student movements, popular upheaval, and revolution. It is important to note that these other publics were not forged by the revolutionary process per se, but are evolutions of at least three decades of economic liberalisation. The policies that accompany economic liberalisation blurred the activities of the economy and of institutional politics along the axes dictated by the neoliberal positing of economics as the 'true political science' (Mitchell 2002).

Staying with this emerging civic public, its apparent ease of translation of the concepts of liberal representative democracy obscures the fact that this glossary does not treat past Tunisian participatory action as a source of knowledge. This seemingly globalised vocabulary of citizenship—with all its imperialist implications—is underwritten by a hardened market logic. This logic elides located histories of civic activism, vocabularies of civic virtue in all their geographical, class, and gendered divisions. Trapped in this multilingual neoliberal universalism, this glossary of civic training points to a specific tension between earlier articulations of a political public and a new civic public performing the political through the prism of commodification.

There are at least two ways to understand the role of multilingual code-switching in the normative neoliberal paradigm of citizenship. One way is to reflect on the hijacking of cultural diversity by this market logic and showing how earlier historical quests for foreign language training as channels for influence are now supplanted by a tolerance to translation so long as the channelling of a particular mode of public engagement is ensured. In this context, I claim, the *national language* spoken inside

the training (in our case dialectal Arabic) is not as germane as the conceptual repertoire—with its ideational and practical horizon—that structures the act of deliberation. In sum then, multilingualism in Tunisia predates economic liberalisation in its various forms as colonial imposition, nationalist appropriation, and development incentive. The position of the various languages that strove for space and for influence was clearly delineated then as a type of power relation. What is happening now is that the neoliberal mode of personhood re-wires the notions of linguistic pluralism and cultural diversity into the driving force of the seemingly equalising value of competition. That this rewiring encourages the obfuscation of local interpretations of civic belonging and civic action and concomitantly pushes for a homogenisation of local realities into a more globally acceptable frame of efficiency is what gets lost in the cross-pollination of vocabularies of the market with those of the ‘demos’ (the people). The demos, the demos of democracy, gets squeezed into a tautology with the middle classes sold on the dream of economic and political participation, at the expense of other types of publics, and people, who relate to this dream differently—if not oppositionally. A second, related, way of understanding this democratic lexicon is to circle back to the liberal concepts of rights and trace their inherent tensions between ‘north’ and ‘south’ (‘west’ and ‘east’) as well as their appropriation by the economistic, performative model of neoliberal politics. This analytical gesture explains how the always already split concept of liberalism, and its historical relationship to soft power agendas, produces modes of apprenticeship into democracy as opposed to accepting the different manifestations and vocabularies of pluralist claims.

Both the above operations require a basic outline of the relationship between liberal thought and neoliberal market logic. Greenhouse has articulated the relationship between politics and the market in neoliberalism, a phenomenon always in process, as follows ‘the prevailing approach (for now) to government to supplant regulation by law with market forces and government functions (especially in the service sector) by private enterprise’ (2010, 1). This direction of governance is trickier to detect as domination precisely because it usurps the discursive and practical manifestations of classical liberal thought, ‘borrowing the language of rights to sustain markets, citizens’ forums to deflect social movements, public office for pursuit of private interest, and credit relationships as chances of social control’ (2010, 4). What happens within this framework is that citizenship and consumption overlap, with participation seen through the prisms of performance, preference, investment and effect (2010, 5-7). These elements are identifiable in the civic training session in question, whereby the ‘communicative and procedural conditions under which people can meaningfully deliberate and make collective decisions’ (Hendriks and Carson 2008, 294) are dictated by the generalised and globalised hardened market logic of consumer advertising. In this ‘commercial market of things deliberative’, the desires of a civic-minded public get construed as skills and capacities that become effective in both public and private domains. This process aims to control how the youth in question as well as their ‘target audience’ will ‘interpret information and ultimately their preferences’ (2008, 307).

It is the other civic publics, not acknowledged in this session except as an example of disengagement and loitering, which break frame from this neoliberal paradigm by not

necessarily giving in to the hegemonies of instrumentalism, managerialism, and pragmatism. The problem with these *-isms* is that they depoliticise and sanitise the social—social difference and social conflict included—at the very moment where Tunisian society puts its pluralism more openly to the test. This is not a new story, and circling back to this logic allows us to see the Ben Ali regime that preceded the revolution beyond the lenses of persistent authoritarianism or democratic gradualism, lenses that focus on detecting authenticity or deception in the intentions of government-led economic liberalisation and government adoption of human and civil rights rhetoric (Cavatorta and Haugbolle 2012). Partly agreeing with Cavatorta and Haugbolle over the need to scrutinize the multiple ways in which regime self-presentation and policies actually impacted the shaping of dissent and ultimately of successful overthrow, I also invite us to see the retreat of representative politics within the neoliberal embrace not as a Tunisian phenomenon per se, but as the features of the neoliberal model itself. What is especially interesting in Tunisia is that the fissures of the model are all the more apparent in a state struggling to consolidate the institutions of representation (of difference) and accountability on the one hand, and adopting the inherently non-democratic and non-state centric objectives of neoliberal governance.

Here is where soft power appears as the smoothest mirror of a US-led and now expanded market logic that has nothing soft about it. I call it hardened because the deregulation it suggests permits and rigidifies forms of alienation embedded in class, regional, and gendered divisions, in Tunisia as elsewhere. Essentially, its move away from state accountability is its strongest intervention in the emerging shaping of citizenship in the national democratic framework. In her critical analysis of soft power in relation to Anglo-Saxon cultural policies, Nisbett (2016) distills the notion of competition as foundational to the ambitions of soft power. In fact, despite the lack of clarity as to the affinity and divergence between the terms of *cultural diplomacy*, *public diplomacy*, *cultural relations*, and soft power, a confusion that originates in the coinage of the term in the 1990s by Joseph Nye (2008), what emerges clearly is that post-Cold War soft power oozes corporate friendliness whereby 'any notions of intercultural understanding and cooperation have been at best forgotten and at worst abandoned.' I appreciate Nesbitt's position but complicate it further by stating that intercultural understanding and cooperation are not forgotten but simply fade into the already split nature of liberalism as 'liberty now for some, unending apprenticeship for freedom for others' (Hall 2011).

The question of apprenticeship for freedom is of course central to the processes that underpin as well as the actions that structure the training programmes I examine. This apprenticeship promotes a 'fully fledged cultural relativism' to make the effects of control less felt, a process that Spivak calls radiation 'in so far as it is not felt as much as earlier modes of domination' (1991, 2). In fact, the multilingualism of these programmes makes their translation vector less felt and therefore imbue training with the impression of both autonomy and locality. By translation vector, I do not only refer to the translation of English terms such as 'capacity building,' 'decision makers', 'launch' and 'teasing' into Arabic and French, but also to the English term being a Euro-American dominant economic concept overshadowing a Tunisian political vocabulary of citizenship forged by earlier and diverse civic actors.

In conclusion, this paper raises a number of questions around the glossary and ensuing practices of citizenship that the training sessions put to work. It is the contention of this paper that the sessions disseminate a conceptual framework of deliberate democracy and civic action that is both multilingual and economistic along neoliberal lines. What is left after we have circled back—and stripped away—these democratic glossaries from their neoliberal foundations, is soft power as the allocation of social and political service away from partisan politics and government institutions (in fact, Nye and other proponents of soft power insist on keeping the government at arm's length) and as a channel for carrying out competitive economic activities in the global arena. Both the ostensible pluralism of these glossaries and their underlying economistic tone perform the same function, that is, to (re)shape the Tunisian public along neoliberal lines of orderly and entrepreneurial competition, production, and consumption. This social engineering has broader ramifications for the post-revolutionary Tunisian state as well as for other states that strive to articulate democratic transition on the incongruous terrains of liberal representation and economic neo-liberalisation.

Endnotes

(1) References to scholarship in the introduction are highly selective; this section does not aim to produce an exhaustive list but, rather, to indicate the types of scholarship interested in qualifying the nature, meaning, and function of power in the Maghrib and beyond.

(2) This research began during the summer of 2013 and has benefitted from a nine month long continuous stay in Tunisia between 2014-2015 and then again during July 2016.

(3) Law no.154 pertained to the regulation of associations and law no.8 pertained to the organisation of Directorate of Accounts. As reported by International Alert, 'under the new laws, CSOs are encouraged to testify, comment on and influence pending government policy and legislation. CSOs are now free from oppressive legal impediments and obstructive state registration requirements, while donors and funders of CSOs are free from state pressures' (International Alert 2013, 12). Tunisian associations operated during both authoritarian regimes of Habib Bourguiba and Zine al-Abiddine Ben Ali. The most well-known, excluding the trade unions that will be mentioned later in the paper, were the Judges' Association, The Tunisian League of Human Rights, and The Association of Democratic Women.

(4) In an effort to show as clearly as possible the multi-lingual vocabulary of the training programme, I invite the reader to read all English statements as if they were in *tunisi* unless indicated by the use of italics. French words will also be italicised.

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